

July 17, 2020

Issue #14

**Wasentha Young,
Martial Arts Master
and Mosaic Artist**

The
Crazy Wisdom
Weekly

shining a light in the dark

Published by the *Crazy Wisdom Community Journal* during the Pandemic.

The Crazy Wisdom Weekly

Happiness consists
more in conveniences
of pleasure that occur
everyday than in
great pieces of good
fortune that happen
but seldom.

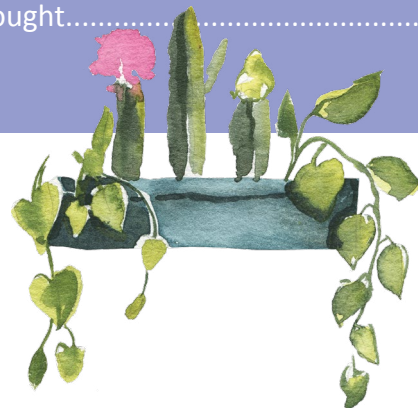
—Benjamin Franklin



Artwork by Jennifer Carson. [See more on her website.](http://furandfeatherfriends.com)
furandfeatherfriends.com.

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Please read our parent publication, *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal*. You can find online archives on our website, crazywisdomjournal.com. *The Crazy Wisdom Journal* has been published three times a year since 1995.

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Our cover photo was taken by Tobi Hollander.

Thank you to our contributors for this issue:

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Debbie Wollard
Wasantha Young
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Tobi Hollander
Carol Karr
Sarah Newland
Jennifer Carson
Bill Zirinsky

word of the week:

Zemblanity

The inevitable discovery of what we
would rather not know. The opposite
—of serendipity.

Because of Covid-19, we didn't publish our usual springtime *Crazy Wisdom Community Journal* in mid-April. We will publish our fall issue on schedule. In the meantime, we created a weekly online version—short, and lively, and perhaps a mild distraction for our local and regional readership. We welcome articles, interviews, recipes, wisdom, personal essays, breathing exercises, favorite places for socially distant walks, news of your dogs, whatever. Send your submission to Jennifer@crazywisdom.net.



By Dr. Dan Saferstein

I was listening today to *No One Knows* by the Nigerian-French singer, Asa. It's a song about a weatherman who is reluctant to make predictions, insisting that, "no one knows tomorrow." It must be a hard time for weather people—not because of the pandemic or the racial injustice—but because most everyone can get all the weather information they need by checking their phone. Of course, Asa's song is not really about the weather or the folks who report it, it's about making the most of today instead of looking ahead to tomorrow.

In this pandemic period, there are plenty of reasons to think that tomorrow will somehow be better than today, but I would be mindful about putting your happiness on hold for too long.

Unhappiness can be habit forming. Making excuses can be habit forming, too. I caught myself making an excuse the other day, thinking that the reason I felt stressed was because we weren't going to be able to go on our annual summer vacation, but the truth is that vacation travel isn't essential to happiness. There are plenty of people all over the world who don't get to go somewhere warmer or more exotic. They find ways to sneak in moments of happiness wherever they are.

Sometimes sneaking in a moment of happiness can feel like taking back something that was stolen from you; other times it can feel like finding something that was lost. Part of my job as a psychologist is to help people reclaim lost and stolen things.

If the pandemic stole some of your happiness, today could be a great day to take it back. The same is true if racism stole something from you. My friend used to tell me that what racism steals is the basic dignity of being treated like a human being.

It's hard for me to understand what it's like to experience that theft, even though it's imbedded somewhere within my DNA. As the son of a Holocaust survivor, I was raised to expect unfairness. My mom used to tell me, "You don't get to choose how life treats you—only how you're going to respond to it."

Today I intend to respond bravely to any challenge that comes my way. I intend to embrace today like a dear friend that I will never get to see again. I have a number of dear friends who I no longer get to see. A few days before my writing mentor's death, he asked me to take him to his favorite restaurant for his "last supper." As we were walking out together, he turned and said, "Ann Arbor seems perfect today, doesn't it?" I can honestly say that Ann Arbor and the rest of the world don't seem perfect to me now, but that won't stop me from trying to experience at least one perfect moment each day.

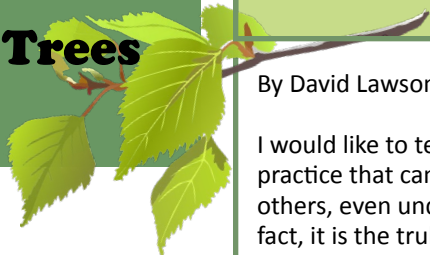
One perfect moment feels well within my reach. I have talked with veterans who have experienced a perfect moment during times of war. My mom experienced a perfect moment in an orphanage during a talent show. A talent show in an orphanage while World War II was raging? That definitely was living for the day. That was pure existential *chutzpah*.

It takes a lot of nerve to appreciate life when things aren't going your way. Everyone can be their best when they're winning. But can you be your best when you're feeling behind? Can you think beyond winning and losing and try to bring out the best in others? The field of play has always been more important than the scoreboard. I think we appreciate that now more than ever.

Dan Saferstein is a Licensed Psychologist with a specialty in sport psychology, working with children, adults, coaches, and teams. Learn more on his website, dansaferstein.com.

From Our Blog

Lessons from the Trees



By Debbie Wollard

Have you been to a redwood forest? Or laid flat on your back watching the stars? Have you seen a person that you've never met, but you are certain that you "know" them?

There are so many ways that people feel connected, and conversely, so many ways that we forget we are connected and tell ourselves that we are all alone.

When I was in a redwood forest in California, after spending a few precious hours in awe admiring these towering ancestors, I came upon an information placard that changed my life forever. The placard said (paraphrasing here) that redwood trees do not have deep tap roots—tap roots which drill down deep into the earth in an effort to support a tree's towering height.

Instead, they have a vast network of shallow roots that intermingle with the roots of the other trees, which is what ultimately keeps them upright but also allows them to share resources (and now, we know information as well—read [The Hidden Life of Trees by Peter Wohlleben](#)).

I stood there stunned into awareness.

I felt the connections.

I longed for that type of connection.

I ultimately had to come to acknowledge that I had these connections, too.

When I lie on my back, in a field or on a sand dune, watching the stars blink into sight and longing for a brief glimpse of a shooting star, I begin to feel something that I only get glimpses of—I feel like I am EVERYTHING! And at the same time I feel like I am a tiny spec (I feel this second half, not in a martyr sort of way—just a way of keeping everything in perspective). It all happens in a flash, not unlike the brief glimpse I get of a shooting star. I know it is something special and I can't hang on to it.

Each time I struggle to hold these two seemingly opposing feelings in my mind and heart, I realize that what they are about is connection. Connection to all that is—all the way out to the cosmos. I am EVERYTHING because I am connected to EVERYTHING. Someone notable once said "There is no other" and in these moments, I believe this to my very core.

Extending Mercy to Ourselves and Others

By David Lawson

I would like to tell you about a transformative meditation practice that can bring peace and comfort to ourselves and others, even under the most difficult of circumstances. In fact, it is the truly challenging that seems to most profoundly elicit human mercy and compassion. The practice I would like to share with you is known in the Tibetan Buddhist tradition as tonglen, which is Tibetan for "sending and receiving."

Anybody can do this. Start by sitting in a relaxed manner with awareness of a person or persons undergoing some mental or physical difficulty. In your mind's eye, "see" this person or persons as clearly as you can in the midst of their suffering. Keeping your eyes closed, also become aware of your natural breathing, without trying to adjust it in any way.

Now, on the inbreath, imagine you are breathing in the other person's pain as completely as you can. This is the wisdom of compassion in action. Notice if you feel yourself holding back, and know that this is natural, especially in the initial stage of practice. You may become aware of a kind of magical thinking that imagines this will actually cause you to get sick. Just know it to be nothing more than fear—forgiving and comforting yourself in the process for having such thoughts.

Next, on the outbreath breathe out all of your own strength, happiness, and wellbeing to the other person. Offer it as freely as you can, at the same time noticing if you would prefer to just keep it for yourself. That is also okay.

Now, make the practice a continuous process with each inbreath and outbreath. On each inbreath take in the pain and difficulty, and on each outbreath offer whatever peace and comfort you can. In this alternating way, you are exercising your ability to be with another person's pain on the inbreath while sending love and healing on the outbreath. Keep at it for at least ten minutes. How do you feel now?

This practice is a very effective way of overturning our normal selfishness and extreme self-protectiveness. It goes against the grain. Tonglen may feel like something you are doing for somebody else, but of course, its most verifiable effect will be on yourself. With this, you affirm that you are up to the challenges that confront you without turning your back on the suffering of others.

If you stay with the practice you may notice over time that you are happier and more self-confident. You may even wake up one day and realize that the feeling of "me against the world" has vanished and that you now know the true flavor of mercy.

I wish you the greatest happiness!

[Read more on our blog!](#)

COMFORT FOOD

Vegan Dark Chocolate Truffles



Courtesy of Tagan Engel of Soulfire Farm. Adapted by Angela Madaras

Makes 25

INGREDIENTS

1—15oz can black beans, drained and rinsed
3 Tbsp coconut oil
2 Tbsp maple syrup
2 Tbsp raw sugar
6 Tbsp unsweetened cocoa powder or raw cacao powder (or you can use ½ C. melted chocolate chips)
1 tsp vanilla

Angela added a side of Macerated Strawberries. One cup chopped strawberries soaked in 2 Tbps Maple Syrup and 1 Tbsp Balsamic Vinegar.

DIRECTIONS

In a food processor fitted with a metal blade, puree black beans, coconut oil, maple syrup, and sugar until very smooth. Scrape down the sides and puree again for one minute.

Add the remaining ingredients and puree until combined. Scrape down the sides and puree again until the entire mixture is

completely smooth. Taste and adjust flavor/sweetness.

If mixture is too soft to roll into balls, chill for 20 minutes. When it is firm, scoop a teaspoon-sized of the truffle mixture and roll into balls with your hands. Place on a parchment lined baking sheet.

Finish truffles with desired coating. For dry coatings like cacao or nuts, put ¼ cup (add more if necessary) in a small bowl or plate, and roll each truffle in it until it is coated. To enrobe in chocolate, melt about 12oz of chocolate in a double boiler or microwave.

Using a fork or toothpick, dip each truffle in chocolate, shaking off extra and placing each truffle on a lined baking sheet to cool. Place the truffles in a resealable glass container and store in the refrigerator for one week, or you can freeze for three months.

Crazy Wisdom Book Pick of the Week

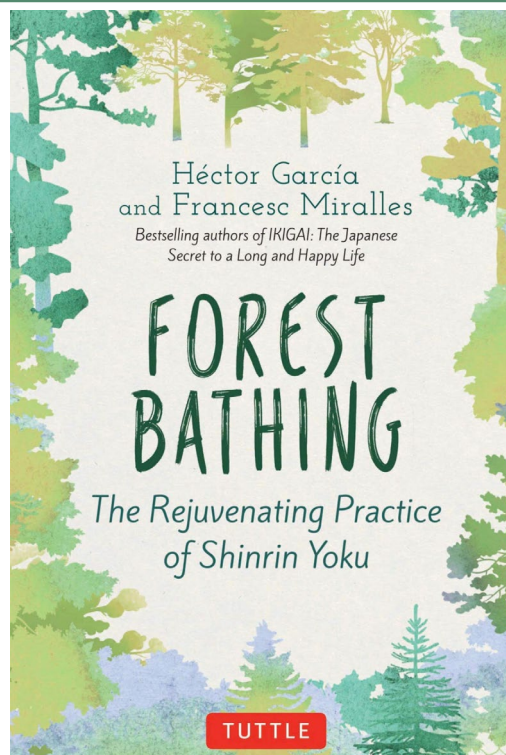
By Sarah Newland

Forest Bathing by Hector Garcia and Francesc Miralles

This book offers guidelines for finding peace and replenishment in any space—from turning off your phone to seeking the irregularities in nature, which in turn can make us less critical of ourselves. It offers tips not only on being fully present and mindful while in the forest, but also on how to tap into that mindfulness at home—even if home is the busiest and most crowded of cities.

From the healing properties of phytoncides (self-protective compounds emitted by plants) to the ways we can benefit from what forest spaces can teach us, this book discusses the history, science, and philosophy behind this age-old therapeutic practice. Examples from the ancient Celts to Henry David Thoreau remind us of the ties between humankind and the natural world—ties that have become more and more elusive to Westerners.

[Click here to purchase a copy of *Forest Bathing*.](#)



5 questions for mosaic artist, Wasentha Young



Most people in our community know you as a Tai Chi and Chi Kung Master, but you are also a mosaic artist. What led you to this medium?

My mother was a great resource and supported my creativity. Before I began my journey into Tai Chi and Chi Kung (Qigong) she encouraged my exploration of art. At age eight someone gave me a mosaic ashtray kit—complete with little tiles on a net, an aluminum tray, glue, and grout. There was something about the grouting process that intrigued me and grabbed my attention. Filling the space between the tiles, making it a whole from many pieces, I promised myself that one day I would revisit mosaics. As a young adult, I wrote poetry to help me process my emotional states, I painted to express what I could not literally describe, and made beaded jewelry to concentrate my mind. By the time I was 20 I was showing in galleries and selling in craft fairs.

Mosaics reentered my life in 2006 after I went to Spain and enjoyed seeing some of Gaudi's work in Barcelona, including his main work, the church of the Sagrada Família, and Park Guell. In addition, I visited the Alhambra where there are porcelain tile mosaics, and right across the ravine was the pebble mosaics in Albayzín, both districts of Granada. What most impressed me was the realization that there are many different styles of mosaics.

As synchronicity would have it, shortly after I returned to Ann Arbor, on my way to the Peoples' Food Coop I came across a mosaic school and began my study. [The school is no longer in Ann Arbor.] There I studied the use of stained glass as the main material used to create a mosaic work of art. Shortly thereafter I was doing an internet search on pebble mosaics, because I was intrigued by its longevity, and came across a school in Chicago that offers a complete study in mosaic art. After the first class, 40 hours over a weekend with a master pebble mosaic instructor, I was hooked. So, I began attending intensive classes to support my exploration into the art of mosaic. There were so many internationally renowned instructors to study with and courses in basic to advanced techniques. These classes resulted in my current use of materials such as stone, Smalti glass (1/4 thick glass imported from Italy and Mexico), minerals, and other elements in my work.

The visceral quality of the rise and fall of the hammer over the hardy, in an almost lyrical/rhythmic way, offers me an artistic sense of meditation in motion. As I select materials, placement, and the flow of lines to express a feeling, I am led into a space of balanced analytical and unpredictable expression which is much like the meditative quality in the movements of Tai Chi and the energetic connections in Chi Kung.

Since Spain I have visited Greece and Italy, exploring the countries and journeying from BCE to the contemporary expressions and styles of mosaics. At some point I would like to visit Central America to experience the Incan and Mayan mosaics.

What are your favorite subjects to portray in your art and why do you think you are drawn to those particular subjects?

I love the challenge of creating movement from what seems to be a rigid material, and delight in the push and pull my eyes experience interplaying with the colors, glistening, intended or unintended shapes in my mosaic work. Sometimes my pieces create a pleasing journey while other times they leave my eyes with nowhere to rest.

My creative subjects embrace transformation and the graceful or chaotic dynamics of energetic forces. Working in themes and subject spontaneity offer me opportunities for development and the gratification of expressing fleeting outbursts of interests. Thematically, my current body of works is focused on clouds; as they can be gentle, foreboding, diffused, appear solid, graceful, violent, and at times appear still, but are always in motion. My "fleeting" interests, much to my surprise, also have a theme—power. Creating these pieces I find myself more driven, often focusing on the concepts of time, symbolism, rites of passage, or some sort of shamanic spirituality.

What do you think is the connection between your martial art and your mosaic art?

This could be an entire article. (LOL) So, I will give you a few examples. Relative to the mechanics of Tai Chi, mosaics is visceral as well as mental. The mind/body connection during the execution of a mosaic is essential from start to finish. You must start with the foundation. In the case of Tai Chi, having a sense

of your stance and weight differentiation in motion lays the groundwork for better relaxation and balance throughout the practice. In mosaics you must think of your substrate thoroughly before you begin the piece. How and where it will be displayed? Which kind of adhesive should be used? How heavy might the piece be? The answer to these considerations determine a certain amount of the balance and sense of boundaries in the work.

Regarding flow, each piece of tesserae, or posture in Tai Chi, has its individuality as part of an integral whole. After the mechanics are explored it is time to feel the flow. In mosaics that would be the “andamento”—meaning the movement of the lines in the image(s) or shape if you are working in 3D. So, in both Tai Chi and mosaics flow comes after knowing where you are in space.

One thing moves, everything moves—another concept/principle in Tai Chi. In creating a mosaic, laying the pieces of tesserae is like putting what seems fragmented pieces into a new landscape. Like the Tai Chi form in motion, one posture leading into the next, I am continuously reshaping internally and externally—integrating mind/body/spirit.

Relative to Chi Kung, mosaics is all about the energy and how the elements work together. How do you take what seems to be a variety of pieces and restructure, or cultivate, to arrive at something that is quite harmonious—or not, depending on your intention. Chi Kung creatively explores the energies of the body, mind, and spirit, along with universe, earth, and nature energies, whether it be through meditation, movement, and breath individually and collectively. In mosaics I explore the creative use of different material elements. I must visualize and place them together to create art that stands alone as something which energetically comes together and cannot be expressed any other way than as a mosaic.

“Ancestral Gathering”



During the stay-at-home orders did you pivot your martial arts business, or did you find yourself more drawn to spending time on your art?

Both have been equally important to me during this time. I service the community in strategies, using Tai Chi, Chi Kung, and meditation for decompressing and revitalizing, connecting and letting go, developing routines for individualized self-care plans, and restructuring the internal landscape through the integration of mind/body/spirit. Under any circumstance these complementary strategies are essential for well-being. So, I hit the ground running, closing the gap in my learning curve, for on-line platforms, as a continuum in “how” I provide for my community. The transformation had to be immediate and I made it as quickly as I could. I think it is because of my arts, Tai Chi, Chi Kung, and mosaics that I was able to “go with the flow” during the pandemic shifts, with grace.

Likewise, for me, art is as essential in maintaining my health and well-being. I dedicate what time I can to continuing to express myself through mosaics. It is quite meditative, centering, and part of my “alone” time. So, “stay-at-home” was not a drastic change. I generally stay creative with my art quite a bit. It is not just a hobby for me, but a profession. In addition to making art, I market my work which makes it a business. I teach privately and have also taught a couple of classes at the Ann Arbor Art Center. The business aspect has been a challenge during this time because the venues that support artists have had to lockdown.

So, I have been putting a bit more time into developing my on-line gallery and figuring out ways to reach patrons of the arts.

How has the pandemic changed how you see the world?

This pandemic and how we have had to respond to sustain life have been really challenging. For someone like myself, a “sensitive”, the wearing of masks and social distancing has been very disruptive to my senses. I have only just begun to see through the haze of dust that hit the fan back in March.

Wasentha Young, continued

The first week I had to find the platform and set it up; the second, why is this not working? The third week, what are breakout rooms? And the fourth why are the sessions not recording the way I'd I thought they would? By the end of the first month, I had the hang of it, including how to download the recordings, edit, and upload them for students to review their lesson. Phew! All of this has expanded my vision of possibilities. People can learn and meet in Tai Chi as well as mosaic art from different parts of the world at any given time. I now have a few students from other states and countries in my classes.

I have also attended a couple of on-line events fostering support for my continued inspiration in art. To stimulate my own appetite for exploring historical artifacts and artists, I discovered there are a number of museum sites that allow you to virtually explore some of the art and natural history exhibits that are on display at their location.

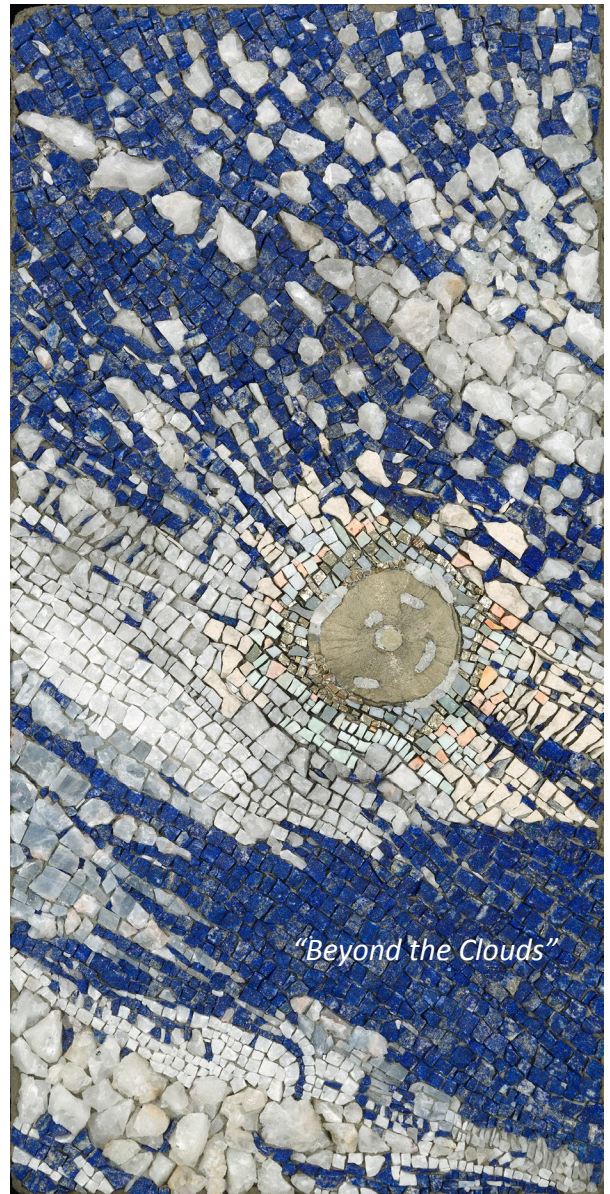
Art patrons know the importance of having expressions of such accessible. It motivates an unspoken language, as does nature. In Chi Kung, we turn to nature to expand our senses and benefit from being in its presence. Likewise, art, for the creator and the viewer, reaches into a depth of internal expansion and identity. I dive, over and over into that depth. With my mosaic work I have had to develop my on-line shop and come up with a few innovative strategies to continue to show my work. I have upgraded my mosaic shop and made a few fun video blogs incorporating art and poetry which I have shared on different platforms of social media.

Experiencing the resilience and support of people has touched my heart in ways that I did not expect. Witnessing those who have it within their means to share financially and making it possible for struggling businesses to survive has helped me reconnect with hope.

And although it is not easy, we have figured out ways to connect with air hugs, laughter, smiling with our eyes, and having truthful conversations about how we are feeling. There is a deeper appreciation for the work that many of us are doing in consideration of each other. I have seen these traits prior to the pandemic, but it has brought them out exponentially not only here in Ann Arbor, but all around the world. *We are not alone.* There are always different perspectives from which one can view a life change. I try not to dwell nor deny any that surface.

They all motivate change and hopefully growth. Truly, nothing can stop the human spirit and its resilience. Being an African-American and a human being has shown me that over and over. Although I do not dwell for long on what may be perceived as positive or negative, I do hope to approach life with best intentions and "divineness" as often as I am able—and smile with my eyes.

Wasentha Young is the owner of the Peaceful Dragon School, a martial arts studio. Art, writing, tai chi and chi kung, these forms of contemplation and awakening practices have inspired Wasentha throughout her life's journey. You can see more of her mosaic work on her website, wasentha.com.



The Crazy Wisdom Calendar

weekly

Online Workshops

Virtual Program—Pollinator Partnerships • July 17 • Noon

• Whether it's a bird, bee, butterfly, or bat, pollinators can be found across the globe! Yet, how can you tell if an animal pollinates? How does pollination work in the first place? Meet live pollinators up close as we learn about one of the most important jobs a creature can play in our ecosystems, and the partnerships they form with the plants they pollinate! Free and for all ages. For more information please email info@lesliesnc.org or visit them online at www.lesliesnc.org.

Virtual Program—Engineering Your World • July 24 • Noon

• Dive into the steps an engineer takes to solve a problem. We'll design, build, and test our way through some at-home engineering projects. Free and for all ages! Pre-register online. For more information please email info@lesliesnc.org or visit them online at www.lesliesnc.org.

[Artwork by Amelia Hatcher-Kay. See more on her website, Hatchery Arts.](#)

Virtual Program - Cow Eye Dissection Demo • July 31 • Noon

• Get a closer look at the anatomy of the eye and how it works together with the brain to create visual images as we demo a real cow eye dissection. Free and for all ages! Pre-registration is required. For more information please email info@lesliesnc.org or visit them online at www.lesliesnc.org.

Virtual Meditation

Myriad of Meditations with Karen Greenberg, R.P.T., and Certified Essence Repatterning Practitioner • July 26 • 6:30 p.m.

• Meditation is an essential component to spiritual evolution. Learn a myriad of meditation techniques, to discover which resonate for you (possibly dissolving years of resistance to mediation). Learn meditations with fire, water, air, earth, with the Four Worlds, with different breathing, with Holy Geometry, sacred letters, powerful Archetypes, spiritual beings, qualities of G-D, with movement, music, toning, colors, scents, gemstones, and trees, including several guided meditations through the Tree of Life. For more information call Karen Greenberg at (734) 417-9511 or email krngrnbg@gmail.com

Writing and Poetry

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Series : Featured Reader Esperanza Cintron, followed by open mic • June 22 • 7 p.m.

• For an invitation to this Zoom event, email cwpoetrycircle@gmail.com. For more information visit this event online at cwcircle.poetry.blog.

Get your calendar listings in by Monday morning at 10 A.M. for the next Crazy Wisdom Weekly Issue!

[Send your listing in here.](#)



Yoga Pose *of the week*



Standing Hand to Big Toe Pose-Side Variation)
Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana

By Carole Caplan

Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana is a challenging yet fun pose useful for developing a sense of grounding and balance while stretching and strengthening the legs and ankles. It particularly stretches the back of the thighs (hamstrings), and invites the hips, shoulders, and arms to open. Practicing this pose calls for focus and flexibility—and a good sense of playfulness! Students with ankle or low back issues should avoid this pose, or work toward it with props and wall support.

In Mountain Pose (Tadasana), feel both feet firmly rooted into the earth. Lift through the back top of the head. Lean back into an imaginary line along your spine that extends both into the earth and up to the sky.

Shift your weight to your left foot. Lifting your right leg, feel your left leg strong and steady. Bring the bottom of your right foot to the inside of your left leg and enjoy a variation of Tree Pose (Vrksasana). Your right foot can be on the inside of the left shin or thigh, but take care to avoid pressing on the knee! Extend your arms into a “V” shape overhead. Reaffirm the grounding of the left leg while extending joyfully up and out through the arms. Breathe deeply. When wiggling and wobbling occur—and they will—gently respond by re-grounding and re-extending.

To move toward Utthita Hasta Padangusthasana, bring your left arm to your hip and your right arm inside your right thigh. Hold your right big toe.

With a straight spine, draw your lower belly in and reground the left leg. Do this by both drawing your leg muscles in and up from the knee while pressing strongly down through your left foot. On an exhalation, open your right hip as much as possible, but take care to keep your hips squared forward and level. You can keep your left hand on your left leg or extend it up and out as you did in Tree Pose. This may be the fullness of the pose for you today.

To deepen the pose, begin to straighten the right leg out to the side and up as much as possible. It is more important to maintain a straight spine than extend the right leg fully. A strap can be used to lift the leg if hamstrings are tight. Lift your sternum and let your shoulder blades slide downward. Re-ground. Re-extend. Lean back again into that imaginary line of energy supporting and stabilizing you. Breathe!

The work is to playfully find balance, lose balance, and find balance again.

To release, draw your right knee to center and in toward your chest, then slowly lower your foot to the floor. Rest in Mountain Pose, fully grounded and lifted. Then repeat on the opposite side.

Carole Caplan teaches yoga, meditation, and sustainable living practices. Learn more online atlivebychoice.com.

Palm Reading



by Vijayalaxmi

FOR APPOINTMENTS & PARTY READINGS

CALL 734-985-8799

Email at readingswithvijayalaxmi@gmail.com

positivepalmistry.com

**The world is spinning, but I remain
present and grounded,
fully able to adjust and re-adjust
to her movements.**

Crazy Wisdom Poetry Series with featured reader Esperanza Cintrón

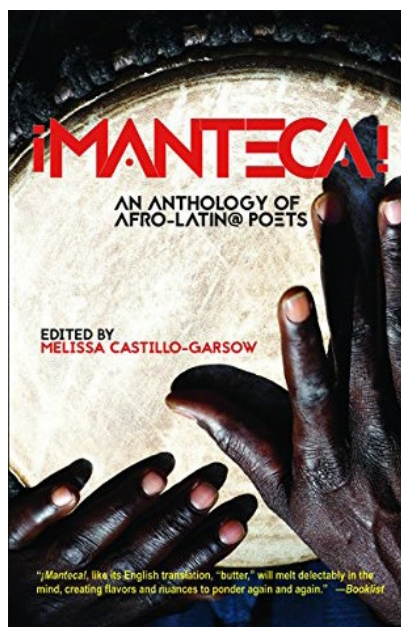


Esperanza Cintrón is author of three books of poetry: *Visions of a Post-Apocalyptic Sunrise*, the Naomi Long Madgett Award-winning *What Keeps Me Sane*, and *Chocolate City Latina*. Her interconnected stories, *Shades, Detroit Love Stories*, was published by WSU Press in 2019. She has recent work in *Manteca! An Anthology of Afro-Latin@Poets*.

7:00 PM - 8:45 PM • Wednesday, July 22, 2020

Email cwpoetrycircle@gmail.com for Zoom link.

Featured reader is followed by Open Mic reading. • FREE. All writers welcome • Read your own or other favorite poetry. • Sign up begins 6:45 p.m. • Poetry Series readings every fourth Wednesday hosted by Joe Kelty, Ed Morin, & Dave Jibson. See our blog at <https://cwcircle.poetry.blog/>



Containing the work of more than 40 poets equally divided between men and women who self-identify as Afro-Latino, *iManteca!* is the first poetry anthology to highlight writings by Latinos of African descent. The themes covered are as diverse as the authors themselves. Many pieces rail against a system that institutionalizes poverty and racism. Others remember parents and grandparents who immigrated to the United States in search of a better life, only to learn that the American Dream is a nightmare for someone with dark skin and nappy hair. In spite of the darkness, faith remains. Anthony Morales' grandmother, like so many others, was "hardwired to hold on to hope." There are love poems to family and lovers, and music salsa, merengue, and jazz permeates this collection.

Find your copy at shopcrazywisdom.com.



The Wisdom of Birds



By Randall Andrews

On a cool autumn morning ten years ago, I lost a stare-down with a Black-capped Chickadee. Hidden beneath his delicate feathers were nerves of steel, and I had the patience of an over-caffeinated humming bird. It was no contest.

I was on my way to fill the birdfeeder, which hung from a low branch of the black walnut tree behind my house. It was nearly depleted, and a mixed group of a dozen or so songbirds were flitting about it, vying for position to snatch up the last few seeds. As I approached, most of those birds, the finches, and nuthatches, and titmice, flew off across the yard, retreating to the edge of the woods. But not the chickadees.

I am a bird lover, and will eagerly argue the merits of any species, but chickadees are my favorites. They are brave, beautiful birds, and they've taught me a lot.

There were three chickadees in the group that morning, and as the rest of the breakfast crowd was hurrying away to the woods, they were casually repositioning themselves on nearby branches of the walnut tree. Two of them moved a bit higher up, but the third, the one who embarrassed me in the staring contest, settled quietly at what I took to be his current perceived safe distance: about six feet.

Filling the feeder had been part of my morning routine for a while, and it was obvious that some of the birds were growing accustomed to my presence, particularly the chickadees. I'd been noticing the gradual shift in their reactions to me for a while, but that morning was the first time I really thought about it. As I stood there, meeting the gaze of that tiny bird, I found myself filled with a warm feeling. He trusted me, I realized, and I was glad for it.



I thought a lot about the chickadee that day, about how bold it was to sit so near me, and about how being so close had made me feel. I'd always enjoyed watching the birds, but now I was curious about the possibility of doing so without the twenty feet and the kitchen window between us. By the next morning, I had

There was still some seed in the feeder that day, and the regulars had assembled. Just like before, they scattered as I approached, some fleeing farther, and a few not far at all. I greeted the nearest chickadee, my buddy from the closest branch, and he responded with his customary "*nee-nee-nee-nee*." Over the course of many years, I've come to understand that it's a phrase that can carry a wide variety of meanings from *good morning* to *hurry up, the feeder's empty*.



Minnie the Tufted Titmouse

As they looked on, presumably baffled, I set up my folding chair and a five-gallon bucket a few feet in front of it. Between the two, I set a board of scrap wood I'd found in my basement, and on the end over the bucket, I placed my favorite yellow frisbee. Into the shallow hollow of the improvised platter, I dropped a handful of sunflower seeds. And then I went back inside. The chickadees were probably back at the feeder before I'd made it through the door, but the others returned soon, bringing with them competition for the limited seating at the regular table. The stage was set. My plan was in motion.

I was not the least surprised when, no more than fifteen minutes later, a chickadee became the first to explore the breakfast beta site. He landed on the edge of the board first, near the middle of its span, took a couple quick hops toward the frisbee, and then

bailed back to the safety of tree. He wasn't gone long, but had to repeat that tentative trip several times before mustering the courage to toe the yellow plastic. Chickadees, like myself, are powerfully motivated by their stomachs. As soon as he nabbed that first seed and realized this new food source was legit, it was game on.

I quit watching at that point and attacked the rest of my to-do list for the day. I flitted about like one of the birds, seeing how much I could get done before heading to work that afternoon. Once in a while, I'd peek out the kitchen window. Following their friend's example, the other chickadees were already on board with stage one of the plan. Things were preceding as I'd expected, and even more quickly that I'd hoped. I congratulated myself.

Prematurely.

These many years later, people ask me all the time how I get the birds to eat from my hands. Depending on who's asking, I have a couple different answers ready to go. Sometimes I go into *the plan*, explaining how I set up a secondary feeding site near the original feeder, filled it at the same time every day, established a routine, and moved it incrementally closer. Other times I say you need to be able to sit still and be quiet. One of those answers sounds a lot simpler than the other, but that's not the case. At least it wasn't for me.

What could be simpler than sitting still and being quiet, right? What could be difficult about doing nothing? Ten years ago, that would have been my answer to both questions: nothing. Now I know better.



I started running in college, primarily as a way to relieve stress. I'd played other sports in high school, and wanted to keep myself in shape as well, but the miles I put in back then were therapeutic first and foremost. Somehow, hitting the accelerator in my legs allowed me to tap the brakes in my brain, something I often struggled to do.

At some point, I realized I was running pretty far, and at a pretty good clip. I signed up for a 10K race, and even though I felt like death at the finish line, I loved it. I've run a lot of races since then, ranging in distance from 5K to marathon, on the pavement and through the forest trails, in the summer heat and in the winter snow. I'm no Olympian, but I'm pretty fast for a guy my age.

One of the great things about the sport of running is its simplicity. You have one goal, and that's to reach the finish line as fast as you can. That's the racing mindset, and it's good . . . if you're racing. If that's your mindset during most of your waking hours, that's not so good. Life isn't supposed to be a race.

That's how I was back then, and if I'm being honest, how I still am too often. I work fast, talk fast, eat fast. I brush my teeth fast, and I have the receding gums to prove it. It's good to be able to hurry when it's appropriate to do so, but it's also good to slow down when haste isn't necessary. It's good to stop, sit still, and be quiet. It's good, but it's not easy.

Phase two of bird-training began with me sitting in the folding chair, struggling to keep still as the birds watched nervously from above. I think I made it about five minutes the first time, long enough for me to think of a hundred other things I could be doing if I was back on the move. It was apparent that I required training myself before I could continue to train the birds.

It took time and practice, but we made slow progress, the birds and I. I learned to relax in a way I never had, to turn off my muscles and tune out my anxious thoughts. I found myself looking forward to sitting out each morning. I'd listen to the birds sing and study the aerial acrobatics they performed with the ease of reflex.

Once I could make myself sit still in the chair, the chickadees tentatively resumed eating from the frisbee, still parked above the bucket. Once they seemed comfortable with that, I began scooting it back along the board, closer and closer to me. Again, they hesitated, but eventually acquiesced. Then the frisbee was in my lap. Then the seeds were in my hands.

Since then, many have followed the example of those first

brave birds. My fingers have been blessed by the soft feet of chickadees, Tufted-titmice, White and Red-breasted Nuthatches, Downy Woodpeckers, Goldfinches, House Finches, Rose-breasted Grosbeaks, and an obnoxiously loud Red-winged Blackbird. I've

accidentally befriended a gray squirrel I call Dorian, who doesn't care much at this point if I'm sitting still or not. He'd probably follow me into the house if I let him.



Golda the Goldfinch

I don't name all the birds, but I name the ones who seem to demand a name. There was Joe the chickadee, who had a white spot in the middle of his black cap (actually, my goddaughter named him). There was Beau with the crooked tail, and Lefty, who continued to show up for years despite having only one functioning leg. There's Picky, the male Downy Woodpecker, who flings away six or eight seeds each visit before finding one he likes. There are Fred and Ethel Grosbeak, who winter in the tropics, but show up here again each spring.

I set out to teach the birds, but they ended up teaching me instead. Chief among their lessons were how to sit still and be quiet. It sounds so simple, and it is in a sense, but it's also profound. Just a few minutes of real stillness can affect the rest of your day to an astonishing degree. It's an experience I urge everyone to seek out for themselves. And for anyone who struggles as I did, I recommend buying some sunflower seeds and recruiting a tiny teacher.

Randall Andrews is the author of two books, [The Last Guardian of Magic](#), and [Finding Hour Way](#), a collection of novellas about navigating life with time travel. Learn more on his website, thelastguardianofm.wixsite.com.

“Nothing in life is to be feared; it is only to be understood. Now is the time to understand more, so that we may fear less.”

— Marie Curie



Photo by Thomas Bennie on Unsplash.